

Time to Hang Up the Mantle by mangagal

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Summary:

They'd been at this game for a while but was anyone ever really prepared to fight a monster?

Stoncy week 2018 day 1

Monster Hunters. Bonus: Multiple perspectives!

Time to Hang Up the Mantle

Author's Note:

Here I am already behind on the first day but that's because I don't know the meaning of the word restraint and this story turned out long. If you're here because of my other series, I'm sorry and I will get back to it it's just that I've been stuck and life was really bad but something new should be up soon! I hope you all enjoy this story!

This was only supposed to be a temporary gig. They were going to hunt monsters part time while they finished up college, full time during breaks and the summer, then by the time they graduated America would be free of monsters. After all, how many could there actually be out there? Too damn many was the apparent answer. They'd been at it for years now, degrees packed away uselessly in a box in their parent's attics. They spent their years traveling across the county in the van they'd bought second or third hand, a mattress in the back; it was cheaper than staying in a motel and monster hunting wasn't exactly bringing in the big bucks. Jonathan sighed, drumming his fingers against the steering wheel as endless fields rolled by and static crackled on the radio every time they were between towers. The spotty radio was grating on his already frayed nerves, the air felt heavy, the sky a strange shade of almost pale green, electricity crackling like there was a storm waiting for them. Jonathan had a bad feeling about this hunt but it was too late to turn back now. They already had their weapons ready and the traps set for the beast, they'd picked Steve up from his last day working as a mechanic in town (they had to do something to keep gas in the tank), they were already half way to the battleground but all Jonathan wanted to do was turn tail and drive the 500 miles back to Hawkins. He knew the anxiety thrumming under his skin, he felt it every time they headed out into the unknown, he just had to grit his teeth and get on with it, he had to stop being a baby.

The moon was rising by the time they pulled off of the main road and onto the gravel that marked the entrance to the abandoned

farm where the monster was apparently lurking. Nancy crawled into the back to shake Steve awake, he'd sprawled over the mattress as soon as they'd picked him up, exhausted from the days of mechanic work and the nights of monster hunting. Jonathan felt a sting of guilt as he looked at the dark circles under his eyes. Steve didn't deserve a life like this, well none of them did really, but it hadn't even been Steve's idea. He and Nancy had cooked it up in the muggy Indiana summer before they had left for school. They had sprung the idea on Steve, told him that of course they didn't expect him to come along but all he had done was laugh.

"Who else is going to make sure the two of you stay safe?" He'd grinned, pulling them both in for a kiss on the cheek before they started planning their great adventure as Steve dubbed it. It hadn't been so much of an adventure; more work themselves into the ground with no thanks and possible loss of limb. The guilt was starting to bubble more viciously in his stomach but Jonathan pushed it down. If Steve wanted to leave he wouldn't try and stop him but he would be glad that there boyfriend was here with them for as long as he could bear to stay even if it wasn't really his battle.

They hid the van behind some trees; it wouldn't do for small town law enforcement to go poking its nose about. They stumbled out of the van and into the ruinous remains of a chicken coop so at least they'd be somewhat dry if not warm while they waited for the lizard creature. A heavy drizzle started up in the first hour of their stake out, showing them that the structure wasn't quite as waterproof as they had hoped. They waited for hours but nothing happened besides a leak opening up right above Jonathan, sending a constant drip of cold water down the neck of his jacket. Frustration prickled under his skin, he hated being damp like this, he hated the wasted time and resources, they would probably have to re-dig the trap if they didn't catch it tonight otherwise it would be filled in with water and mud. He let out a long sigh that bled out some of his frustration. If the monster didn't show in the next couple of hours they would call it a night and see if they could find a motel to warm up in, maybe break into their stash of ramen noodles as a treat.

"Maybe this thing doesn't like rain," Steve broke the silence for the first time in hours, "maybe we should head out and try again

tomorrow.” Jonathan turned to snap at him, even though he had been about to suggest the exact same thing, but the sight that confronted him froze the words in his throat. The corner that Steve was crouched in was more or less under the open sky; he was soaked down to his thin white undershirt, which was all he had on since he’d given his flannel work shirt and jacket to Nancy. Nancy was hardly more than skin and bones and she was shaking like a leaf from the cold that had blown in with the rain. They sure were a sad looking bunch.

“Yeah,” Jonathan said with a sigh, already gathering up their things, “sounds like a plan.” Steve led the way, Nancy in the middle, and Jonathan bringing up the rear lugging most of their gear. They’d been chatting since they ended the stake out, what did it matter since the thing obviously didn’t like the rain? Nancy turned back, probably to make some good-natured jab about how slow he was being but her face turned white as a sheet and she let out a warning cry. Jonathan whipped around just in time to catch a large scaly tale to the face.

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It was too bright to still be outside but Jonathan couldn’t figure out where else they could be. He tried to pry his eyes open but they felt crusted shut. The smell of antiseptic was thick in the air, he was lying on a stiff cot, and there was the faint whisper of voices near by and beeping of machines. Great, he’d landed himself in the hospital, they definitely didn’t have the money for this. He went to rub the crud out of his eyes but small thin hands stopped him.

“Don’t,” Nancy pulled his hands away from his face, “you’ll pull at your stitches.” He managed to pry his eyes open with a bit of trouble to see his beautiful boyfriend and girlfriend sitting by his side, both looking a little worried but all in one piece. He let out a sigh, some of the tension he didn’t know he’d been holding melted away.

“So what’s the story?” He asked, rolling the kinks out of his shoulders.

“We’ll my loving husband,” Nancy set into her story, leaning forward to tuck his hair away from the wound, “you slipped in some

mud and split your eyebrow open on a rock. Your cousin drove us to the ER.”

“Cousin?” Jonathan asked wrinkling his nose.

“They were only going to let family in,” Steve said dropping his voice, “so it was that or I had to wait outside.”

“Didn’t know I had such an attractive cousin.” Jonathan grumbled settling back against the cot, “So when can we leave.”

“The doctor just wanted to wait until you woke up,” Nancy said, fussing with his blanket, smoothing back his hair, back to the blanket in an endless cycle, “so you should be able to go soon.” Jonathan captured her hands in his, pressing a kiss to the calloused palm of her hand.

“Nancy I’m fine.” He pressed another kiss to her knuckles to emphasize it.

“I know.” She said, finally smiling, before leaning forward to press a soft kiss to his lips.

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“Shit, shit, shit!” Steve yelled as he went flying past the spot her and Jonathan were waiting. She felt a little bit bad about using him as bait but this creature seemed to have a preference for long lanky boys and if Steve wasn’t the longest and lankiest boy she knew. Plus he could run pretty fast, the monster probably wouldn’t be able to catch him and even if it did they would be sure to save him. So as Steve went screeching by the two of them pulled the tripwire tight in time for the monster to come crashing in right behind him. It was almost woman like; if viewed in very dim light without glasses on and if the women you were use to seeing had far too many slithering limbs.

“Fuck!” Jonathan grunted, as the creature was much stronger than they had anticipated. They dug their heels into the earth, bracing against the roots that covered the ground. It slowed her for a moment but Nancy could feel the wood cracking under the pressure.

She let out a curse of her own as they were suddenly being dragged behind the monster like they weighed nothing at all. Tree roots caught at their bodies as they were dragged on their bellies behind the beast. Rocks and roots smacked against her face and she knew she would be one big bruise if they survived the night.

Nancy's eyes darted around searching for a solution. They couldn't let go of the wire, they were slowing it down just enough that it couldn't devour their boyfriend, but they couldn't exactly do anything being dragged like this. Her eyes lit upon a young tree coming up fast, it might work. She stuck her arm out and managed to snag it, giving her an anchor to hopefully slow their journey. The joint of her shoulder protested painfully as the monster tried to chase after its prize. The monster turned snarling at her in anger. Steve took the momentary distraction to hit it with everything he had and his bat. The monster turned back to Steve, seemingly not dissuaded from her prize despite the fact he was hitting it with a bat. Nancy let out a groan as the monster tried to pull forward again. She gritted her teeth, trying to pull the monster back with all of her strength. The creature didn't like that and pulled back. Nancy let out a shrill scream as her shoulder gave a sickening pop.

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"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Nancy screamed as someone popped her shoulder back into place.

"Young lady!" The nurse exclaimed as she walked in through the curtain partition, "Watch your language! You'll never find yourself a husband if you talk like that!"

"Well the thing is," Steve said with a big grin, holding up her hand that wasn't being crammed into a sling to show off their wedding bands, "she already found someone to marry and I happen to like how she swears like a sailor." He finished by pressing a loud kiss to her cheek. The nurse grumbled, shoving a little paper cup with painkillers into her hand. Nancy threw the pills back dry, smiling at the thought of how the nurse would react if she knew that their rings were actually a set of three. They walked out hand in hand, Steve rattling her bottle of prescription painkillers. Jonathan was leaning against the side of the van, trying to look cool but just looking

battered.

“Do I really look that bad?” Nancy asked teasingly, feeling brave enough to stand up on her tippy toes to give him a kiss.

“You actually look worse.” He responded with a crooked little grin.

“Alright children,” Steve chided, pulling open the door for them with a teasing bow, “get in the van.” They piled in, Steve taking the wheel to let the two of them rest. They were miles onto the dark country road before Steve spoke again.

“Hey,” he said quietly, almost in a whisper, “what do you guys think about stopping?”

“What do you mean?” Nancy asked nonplus, unsure about where this had come from.

“Should we stop monster hunting.” Steve clarified, drumming his fingers anxiously against the steering wheel, “I mean, it’s so dangerous and what are we even doing it for? Does it even make a difference? They don’t know, they don’t thank us. Maybe we should just stop.”

“You know we can’t do that,” Jonathan said softly in the dark of the night, “we can’t just leave those monsters out there, besides, we’re all fine.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Steve replied but by the look on his face as they drove off into the night Nancy didn’t think he meant it.

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The fight had been a hard one and they were all beat. What they had thought would just be one monster had turned out to be a pack, with skin that seemed to already be rotting and long razor sharp claws. They really hadn’t been prepared for it but they had made do and come out more or less in one piece. Steve scrunched up his nose as he threw another body on the pier, trying not to hurl at the stench their burning flesh gave off. Yuck, why couldn’t they just leave them here to rot? Steve noticed another body lying near the

edge of the fires light. There were just a few more then they could be done for the night, maybe even rent a room to get a real shower in. Steve was distracted by the thought of hot pressurized water so he didn't see the yellow glint of the beast's eye until it was too late, until it had already taken a swipe at his soft unprotected stomach.

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The world was fuzzy as he opened his eyes. The white ceiling slowly came into focus as he lay there slowly blinking. Everything seemed to throb with pain in time with his heartbeat, at least that meant he was still alive even if he felt like death warmed over.

"Steve?" Nancy asked, leaning over him. The florescent light behind her creating a frizzy halo, dark circles sitting heavily beneath her blue eyes, eyebrows furrowed. "Are you really awake this time?" She asked smoothing his long hair off of his face.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Steve tried to sit himself up but the pain stopped him, he didn't bother protesting when Nancy pushed him back down.

"We thought you had a couple times," she said continuing to stroke his hair, "but you just talked nonsense." He hummed softly, her fingers felt nice in his hair. He was content to lie there for a moment before turning his head to survey the rest of the room. It was empty.

"Where's Jonathan?" Steve asked, brows furrowing.

"He's outside," Nancy said, "I'll go get him soon."

"Why isn't he here?" Steve asked whining a little.

"When you were out of it before," Nancy bit at her lip, "you kept calling him babe and the nurses were starting to get suspicious."

"Oh." Steve flushed embarrassedly; he couldn't believe he'd been so stupid.

"Hey," Nancy soothed, "it's not your fault. You were super drugged up, no one blames you. We'll talk to the doctor then I'll go

get him okay?" The doctor was jovial and teased him about the dangers of local wildlife as he poked and prodded at Steve's tender internal organs.

"Well everything seems to be healing fine so far." The man said snapping off his gloves, "If everything continues to go well you can go home in a couple days. You're a lucky young man, any deeper and it would have perforated your spleen." And the doctor floated off, like he hadn't just told Steve something horrifying. A nurse came in and gave him something for the pain as Nancy went out to find Jonathan. It made him a little floaty but it was almost nice.

"The nurse just did her rounds," Nancy said out in the hallway, "you've got at least 15 minutes by yourself but I'll wait in the hallway and keep watch." Then beautiful, glorious Jonathan appeared in his room, closing the door firmly before making his way over. Steve was sure he had a dopy smile on his face but he honestly couldn't make himself care.

"Jonathan!" Steve struggled to sit up father in his propped up position.

"Stop it idiot," Jonathan said looking alarmed as he quickly crossed the room, "you're going to hurt yourself more!" Jonathan pushed him back down and Steve couldn't help but melt under his hands, he'd missed the other man.

"It's fine," Steve slurred, "they gave me something. I'm fine." Jonathan got this look; Steve wasn't quite sure what it meant. "Jonathan?"

"You almost weren't fine." Jonathan said quietly but he almost sounded angry.

"But I am fine buddy." Steve reached out a clumsy hand to pat his arm.

"But you almost weren't!" Jonathan jerked his head up, tears welling up in his eyes, "Steve, you almost died! We thought you were going to die before we could get you here! There was so much blood, I thought that there was no way someone could bleed that much and

still be alive. You had to have surgery Steve; I thought you weren't going to wake up. Do you have any idea how scary that was?" The tears overflowed and ran down his cheeks. Steve wanted to reach up and wipe them away but when he tried to reach farther it caused his stitches to pull painfully. Steve couldn't help the pained hiss he let out.

"What? What's wrong?" Jonathan panicked, searching for a solution.

"Nothing's wrong Byers," Steve said, trying to smile, "just get over here."

"I can't," Jonathan said reluctantly, "I'll hurt you."

"No you won't," Steve said, "you're too careful. No get over here stupid." Jonathan sighed but complied, carefully arranging himself before leaning gently against Steve's shoulder, nuzzling in against the soft skin of his neck.

"It's fine," Steve said softly, "I'm fine." He pressed a soft kiss to the top of Jonathan's head before letting out a yawn and drifting off against his love.

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When Steve woke up again the overhead light was off but sunlight was streaming in through the window. Nancy and Jonathan's heads were bowed together as they talked quietly. Steve was content to just lie there and watch them for a while, he really was lucky to have not one but two such pretty people in his life. He was able to watch them quietly for a few minutes before Nancy glanced up and caught him staring. She gave him a small smile. She looked better than she had earlier, like she had gotten a few hours of sleep and a weight had lifted off her shoulders.

"Hey there pretty boy," she cooed, "how are you feeling?" How was he feeling?

"I feel pretty good actually," Steve said surprised, "nothing even hurts that badly."

"Yeah that would be the morphine." Jonathan quipped but gave him a smile anyway.

"So Jonathan and I have been talking..." Nancy started.

"I sure hope you've been," Steve sassed, "it would be sad if you'd sat here all this time in silence." Jonathan reached over and smacked his shin. "Hey!" He complained, "I'm hurt don't hit me!"

"Shush, let Nancy finish." Jonathan said.

"So Jonathan and I have been talking," she shot Steve a look, "and we were thinking about maybe settling down somewhere." She looked almost nervous, like Steve was going to be the one to shoot the idea down. Like he hadn't always been the one trailing around behind them with no clue what was going on half of the time.

"This isn't about me is it?" Steve asked, gesturing to his bandaged torso, "You don't have to stop for me. I know how important all this is to you two."

"It's not about this." Nancy protested.

"It's not only about this." Jonathan amended, "Look we all knew that something like this was a possibility." They sat in somber silence for a moment before Jonathan continued, "We knew it could but we never thought it actually would and now that it has we can't bare the thought of it happening again. We won't be able to go on if we lose somebody. We just can't." Steve felt a little flutter at that. He knew they were important to each other, he knew that they cared about him. He just didn't know that they cared this much, that they would care enough to stop everything just for him.

"But what about the monsters?" Steve asked, he was happy about it but he didn't want them to regret giving this up. "They're still out there. How can we just leave people to get ripped apart by them?" Steve asked. Jonathan mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like, "Better them than you." Before Nancy hit him.

"We knew we couldn't do this forever," Nancy said with a sigh, rolling her neck, "we need to stop sometime, might as well do it

now. Leave the hunting to someone younger, settle down somewhere, the whole shebang.” She smiled, reaching out for Steve’s hand, “So, what do you think?”

“The whole nine yards?” Steve asked raising an eyebrow, Nancy nodded, “A house, a yard, nine to five jobs, a coffee table?”

“Yup, all of it.” Jonathan said, smiling at Steve’s enthusiasm.

“A kid?” Steve asked cautiously. He knew he was pushing things here but they were being soft with him and probably wouldn’t give him a hard time about this. Nancy let out a heavy sigh, rolling her eyes but Steve could tell she didn’t really mean it.

“Why don’t we start with a dog and see how it goes from there?”

Author's Note:

Hi lovelies! I hope you enjoyed this!

Notes about the story. If you really see a green sky head for shelter as it means a tornado can be happening soon. The story spans from when they're about 25-early 30's. These are not the only occasions that they got injured but they were the ones important to the story. They're not really married (as they're 3 people) but they keep the rings for alternate identities and because they love each other and if they legally could they'd be married. They're in their 30's by the end so it is normal that they would talk about having kids and have talked about it before but had decided it was too dangerous with them fighting monsters. Jonathan cries the most out of the three of them followed by Nancy and Steve bringing up the rear with his iron tear ducts. Also I love mechanic Steve with all of my heart and soul.

See you for day 2! (hopefully I'll get to it soon!)